

Protestant pastors say fear prevalent in pews

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BRENTWOOD, Tenn.—“Fear not” is a frequent command in the Bible, but most pastors feel churchgoers aren’t getting the message.

A [Lifeway Research study](#) finds about 7 in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors (69 percent) believe there is a growing sense of fear within their congregations about the future of the nation and world.

Additionally, more than 3 in 5 (63 percent) say their churches have a similar increasing dread specifically about the future of Christianity in the United States and around the world.

Among U.S. Protestant pastors

I believe there is a growing sense of fear within our congregation about ...



Notes: 29% disagree and 1% say not sure.



Notes: 36% disagree and 1% say not sure.

"The Bible tells followers of Jesus Christ to expect trials, tribulations and suffering," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

"However, Scripture doesn't prescribe fear as the response to adversity. Instead, it frequently encourages rejoicing and faithfulness as anxieties are cast upon God."

Pastors are more than twice as likely to agree than disagree that their congregations are fearful about the future of the nation and world. Seven in 10 (69 percent) agree, including 25 percent who strongly agree, while 29 percent disagree.

White (71 percent) and Hispanic pastors (62 percent) are the most likely to say they see fear for the future in their congregations. African American pastors are the least likely to agree (42 percent) and the most likely to disagree (55 percent).

Pastors at nondenominational (75 percent), Methodist (74 percent), Baptist (72 percent) and Lutheran (72 percent) churches are more likely than Pentecostal pastors (53 percent) to spot fear among their congregants.

Those leading the smallest churches, with fewer than 50 in attendance at weekend worship services, are among the most likely to say their congregations have a growing fear about the future of the country and world (72 percent).

Changes over time

Despite so many Protestant pastors saying their churches are fearful, the percentage is down compared to previous studies.

In 2010, 76 percent said there was a growing sense of fear within their congregations about the future of the nation and world. In 2011, 73 percent said the same. The percentage remained similar (74 percent) in 2014,

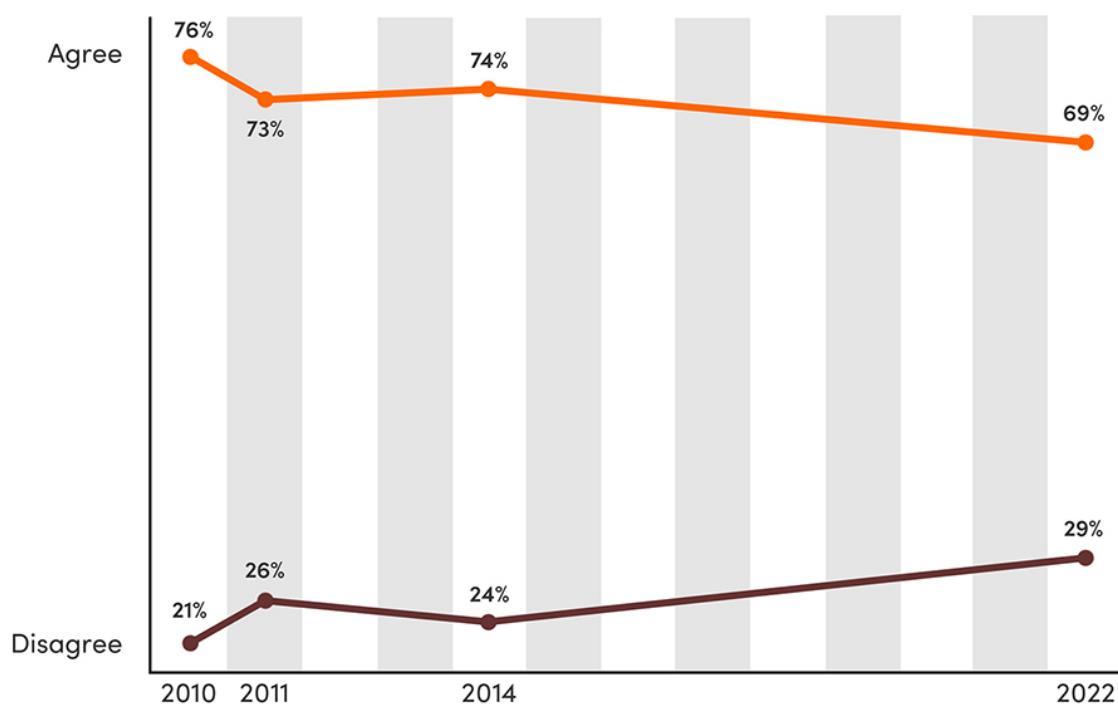
before falling to 69 percent today.

Over the same period, the percentage of pastors who disagree and don't feel their churches have a growing fear about the future has increased to 29 percent today after 21 percent in 2010, 26 percent in 2011 and 24 percent in 2014.

"Compared to a decade ago, a few more churches today are avoiding the impulse to fear changes and adversity around them," McConnell said. "But a large majority of pastors see their congregations moving toward fear rather than away from it."

While the percentage has fallen, 7 in 10 pastors still say their church has a growing sense of fear about the future of the nation and world.

Among U.S. Protestant pastors



While 69 percent of pastors say their congregations have a growing sense of fear about the future of the country and world, slightly less, but a still significant majority (63 percent), say their churches have a growing sense of fear about the future of Christianity specifically. Around 1 in 5 (21 percent) strongly agree, with 36 percent disagreeing.

“The number of people in America embracing the Christian faith is on a downward trajectory. So, it isn’t surprising congregations are afraid of this trendline,” McConnell said. “Unfortunately, the growth of Christianity in other parts of the world is not bringing American Christians much comfort.”

Denominational and demographic differences

Mainline pastors (40 percent) are more likely than evangelical pastors (33 percent) to disagree that a growing fear about the future of Christianity exists in their churches.

Among those more likely to spot fear in their pews, white pastors (64 percent) are more likely than African American pastors (47 percent). Pastors in the Midwest (67 percent) are also more likely than those in the West (54 percent).

Denominationally, non-denominational (76 percent), Baptist (68 percent) and Methodist (66 percent) pastors are more likely than Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (49 percent) to see a rising concern for the future of Christianity.

The phone survey of Protestant pastors was conducted Sept. 6-30, 2022. Responses were weighted by region and church size to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys,

providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.